L. Bridges Lunt

A MEMOIR OF *THE LIFE* OF THE LATE ROBERT BURNS;

WRITTEN BY R. HERON.

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And thou, ſweet poeſy, thou loveliеſt maid,
Still firſt to fly, where ſenſual joys invade;
Unfit, in theſe degenerate times of ſhame,
To catch the heart, or ſtrike for honeſt fame;
Dear charming nymph, neglected and decried,
My ſhame in crowds, my ſolitary pride;
Thou ſource of all my bliſs, and all my woe,
Who found'ſt me poor at firſt, and keep'ſt me ſo;
Thou guide by which the nobler art, excel,
Thou nurſe of every virtue, fare thee well!

GOLDSMITH's *Deſerted Village.*

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A MEMOIR OF *THE LIFE* OF THE LATE ROBERT BURNS.

BIOGRAPHY is, in ſome inſtances, the moſt trifling and contemptible, in others, the moſt intereſting and inſtructive of all the ſpecies of literary compoſition. It would be difficult to perſuade one's ſelf to agree with ſeveral late hiſtorians of the lives of poets, philoſophers, and ſtateſmen; that, the mere, induſtrious accumulation of dates, anecdotes, and witticiſms, of tranſactions in which no peculiarities of genius and character were diſplayed, or of obſcure events by which the habits of feeling, thought, or action, were in no way remarkably influenced; can deſerve to be ambitiouſly ſtudied, or

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admired, as the perfection of biographical writing. The following memoir of the life of one who was a GREAT MAN, *ſolely of* GOD ALMIGHTY'S *making ſuch;* has been compoſed under the direction of a very different, although perhaps not a more correct, critical principle. If, however, this principle be juſt; it is the proper buſineſs of the biographer; TO TRACE THE GRADUAL DEVELOPEMENT OF THE CHARACTER AND TALENTS OF HIS HERO, WITH ALL THE CHANGES WHICH THESE UNDERGO FROM THE INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES, BETWEEN THE CRADLE AND THE GRAVE; AND AT THE SAME TIME, TO RECORD ALL THE EMINENT EFFECTS WHICH THE DISPLAY OF THAT CHARACTER, AND THE EXERCISE OF THOSE TALENTS, HAVE PRODUCED UPON NATURE AND ON HUMAN SOCIETY, IN THE SPHERE WITHIN WHICH THEY WERE EXHIBITED AND EMPLOYED. The writer's wiſhes will be amply gratified; if this TRIFLE ſhall be found to afford any expoſition of the nicer laws of the formation and progreſs of human character, ſuch as ſhall not be ſcorned as *data* by the moral philoſopher, or as facts to enlighten his imitations, by the dramatiſt; if it ſhall be received by

by the world in general, as an honeſt though humble tribute to the merits of illuſtrious genius; and above all, if it ſhall be regarded by the candid and the good, as preſenting ſome details and reflections, of which the direct tendency is, to recommend that ſteady VIRTUE, without which even genius in all its omnipotence is ſoon reduced to paralytic imbecility, or to maniac miſchievouſneſs.

ROBERT BURNS was a native of *Ayrſhire*, one of the weſtern counties of *Scotland*. He was the ſon of humble parents. His father paſſed through life in the condition of a hired labourer, or a ſmall farmer. Even in this ſituation, it was not hard for him to ſend his children to the pariſh-ſchool, to receive the ordinary inſtruction in reading, writing, arithmetic, and the principles of religion. By ſuch a courſe of education, young ROBERT profited to a degree that might have encouraged his friends to deſtine him to one of the liberal profeſſions, had not his father's poverty made it neceſſary to remove him from the ſchool, as ſoon as he had grown up, to earn for himſelf the means of ſupport, as a plough-boy or a ſhepherd.

THE eſtabliſhment of PARISH-SCHOOLS; but for which, perhaps, the infant energies of this young genius might never have received that firſt impulſe by which alone they were to be excited into action; is one of the moſt beneficial that have been ever inſtituted in any country; and one that, I believe, is no where ſo firmly fixed, or extended ſo completely throughout a whole kingdom, as in Scotland. Every pariſh has, here, a ſchoolmaſter, almoſt as invariably as it has a clergyman. For a ſum rarely exceeding twenty pounds, in ſalary and fees, this perſon inſtructs the children of the pariſh in reading, writing, arithmetic, book-keeping, Latin, and Greek. The ſchoolmaſters are generally ſtudents in philoſophy or theology. Hence, the eſtabliſhment of the pariſh-ſchools, beſide its direct utilities, poſſeſſes alſo the accidental advantage of furniſhi g an e> cellent nurſery of future candidates for the office of parochial clergymen. So ſmall are the fees for teaching, that no parents, however poor, can want the means to give their children at leaſt ſuch education as young BURNS received. From the *ſpring* labours of a plough-boy, from the *ſummer* employment of a ſhepherd, the peaſant-youth often returns,

returns, for a few months, eager to receive new inſtruction in the pariſh-ſchool.

It was ſo with Burns. He returned from labour to learning, and from learning went again to labour; till his mind began to open to the charms of taſte and knowledge; till he began to feel a paſſion for books and for the ſubjects of books, which was to give a colour to the whole thread of his future life. On nature, he ſoon began to gaze with new diſcernment, and with new enthuſiaſm. His mind's eye opened to perceive affecting beauty and ſublimity, where, by the mere groſs peaſant, there was nought to be ſeen, but water, earth, and ſky, but animals, plants, and ſoil: even as the eyes of the ſervant of Eliſha were ſuddenly enlightened to behold his maſter and himſelf guarded from the Syrian bands, by horſes and chariots of fire, to all but themſelves, inviſible.

What might perhaps firſt contribute to diſpoſe his mind to poetical efforts, is, a particular practice in the devotional piety of the Scottiſh peaſantry. It is ſtill common for them to make their children get by heart the pſalms of David,

in that verſion of homely rhymes, which is uſed in their churches. In the morning, and in the evening of every day; or, at leaſt on the evening of every Saturday and Sunday; theſe pſalms are ſung in ſolemn family-devotion, a chapter of the bible is read, an extemporary prayer is fervently uttered. The whole books of the ſacred ſcriptures are continually in the hands of almoſt every peaſant. And it is impoſſible, that there ſhould not be occaſionally ſome ſouls among them, awakened to the divine emotions of genius, by that rich aſſemblage which theſe books preſent, of almoſt all that is intereſting in incidents, or pictureſque in imagery, or affectingly ſublime or tender in ſentiments and character. It is impoſſible that thoſe rude rhymes, and the ſimple artleſs muſic with which they are accompanied, ſhould not occaſionally excite ſome ear to a fond perception of the melody of verſe. That BURNS had felt theſe impulſes, will appear undeniably certain to whoever ſhall carefully peruſe his *Cottar's Saturday's Night;* or ſhall remark, with nice obſervation, the various fragments of *ſcripture* ſentiment, of *ſcripture* imagery, of *ſcripture* language, which are ſcattered throughout his works.

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STILL more intereſting to the young peaſantry, are thoſe ancient ballads of love and war, of which a great number are yet popularly known and ſung in Scotland. While the prevalence of the Gaelic language in the northern parts of this country, excluded from thoſe regions the old Anglo-Saxon ſongs and minſtrels: Theſe ſongs and minſtrels were, in the mean time, driven by the Norman conqueſts and eſtabliſhments, out of the ſouthern counties of England; and were forced to wander, in exile, toward its northern confines, or even into the ſouthern diſtricts of the Scottiſh kingdom. Hence, in the old Engliſh ſongs, is every eminent bard ſtill related to have been of the *north country;* but, on the contrary, in the old Scottiſh ſongs, it is always the *ſouth country*, to which every favourite minſtrel is ſaid to belong. Both theſe expreſſions are intended to ſignify one diſtrict; a diſtrict comprehending preciſely the ſouthern counties of Scotland, with the moſt northern counties of England. In the ſouth of Scotland, almoſt all the beſt of thoſe ballads are ſtill often ſung by the ruſtic maid or matron at her ſpinning-wheel. They are liſtened to, with raviſhed ears, by old and young. Their rude me-

ſody; that mingled curioſity and awe, which are naturally excited by the very idea of their antiquity; the exquiſitely tender and natural complaints ſometimes poured forth in them; the gallant deeds of knightly heroiſm, which they ſometimes celebrate; their wild tales of demons, ghoſts, and fairies, in whoſe exiſtence ſuperſtition alone has believed; the manners which they repreſent; the obſolete, yet pictureſque and expreſſive language in which they are often clothed; give them wonderful power to tranſport every imagination, and to agitate every heart. To the ſoul of BURNS, they were like a happy breeze touching the ſtrings of an Æolian harp, and calling forth the moſt raviſhing melody.

BESIDE all this, the *Gentle Shepherd*, and the other poems of *Allan Ramſay*, have long been highly popular in Scotland. They fell early into the hands of BURNS. And while the fond applauſe which they received, drew his emulation; they preſented to him likewiſe treaſures of phraſeology, and models of verſification. *Ruddiman's Weekly Magazine* was, during this time, publiſhed; was ſupported chiefly by the original communications

munications of correſpondents; and found a very extenſive ſale. In it, BURNS read, particularly, the poetry of *Robert Ferguſon*, written chiefly in the Scottiſh dialect, and exhibiting many ſpecimens of uncommon poetical excellence. The *Seaſons* of *Thomſon*, too, the *Grave* of *Blair*, the far-famed *Elegy* of *Gray*, the *Paradiſe Loſt* of *Milton*, the wild ſtrains of *Oſſian*, perhaps the *Minſtrel* of *Beattie*, were ſo commonly read, even among thoſe with whom BURNS would naturally aſſociate, that poetical curioſity, although leſs ardent than his, could, in ſuch circumſtances, have little difficulty in procuring them.

WITH ſuch means to give his imagination a poetical bias, and to favour the culture of his taſte and genius, BURNS gradually became a poet. He was not one of thoſe forward children, who, from a miſtaken impulſe, begin prematurely to write and to rhyme, and hence, never attain to excellence. Converſing familiarly for a long while, with the works of thoſe poets who were known to him: Contemplating the aſpect of nature, in a diſtrict which exhibits an uncommon aſſemblage of the beautiful and the ruggedly grand, of the cultivated and

and the wild: Looking upon human life with an eye quick and keen, to remark as well the ſtronger and leading, as the nicer and ſubordinate features of character: It was thus that he ſlowly and unconſciouſly acquired a poetical temper of ſoul, and a poetic caſt of thought. He was diſtinguiſhed among his fellows, for extraordinary intelligence, good ſenſe, and penetration, long ere they ſuſpected him to be capable of writing verſes. His mind was mature, and well ſtored with ſuch knowledge as lay within his reach; he had made himſelf maſter of powers of language, ſuperior to thoſe of almoſt any former writer in the Scottiſh dialect; before he conceived the idea of ſurpaſſing *Ramſay* and *Ferguſon*.

In the mean time, beſide the ſtudious bent of his genius, there were other features in his opening character, which might ſeem to mark him for a poet. He began early in life to regard with ſullen diſdain and averſion, all that was ſordid in the purſuits and intereſts of the peaſants among whom he was placed. He became diſcontented with the humble labours to which he ſaw himſelf confined,

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and with the poor ſubſiſtence that was all he could earn by them. He was excited to look upon the rich and great, whom he ſaw around him, with an emotion between envy and contempt; as if ſomething had ſtill whiſpered to his heart, that there was injuſtice in the exterior inequality between his fate and theirs. While ſuch emotions aroſe in his mind, he conceived an inclination,—very common among the young men of the more uncultivated parts of Scotland,—to go abroad to *America* or the *Weſt Indies*, in queſt of a better fortune.—His heart was, at the ſame time, expanded with paſſionate ardour, to meet the impreſſions of love and *friendſhip*. With ſeveral of the young peaſantry, who were his fellows in labour, he contracted an affectionate intimacy. He eagerly ſought admiſſion into the brotherhood of *Free Maſons*; which is recommended to the young men of this country, by nothing ſo much as by its ſeeming to extend the ſphere of agreeable acquaintance, and to knit cloſer the bonds of friendly endearment. In ſome *Maſon Lodges* in his neighbourhood, BURNS had ſoon the fortune, whether good or bad, to gain the notice of ſeveral gentlemen who were better able than his

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fellow-peaſants, to eſtimate the true value of ſuch a mind as his. One or two of them might be men of convivial diſpoſitions, and of religious notions rather licentious than narrow; who encouraged his talents, by occaſionally inviting him to be the companion of their looſer hours; and who were at times not ill pleaſed to direct the force of his wit and humour againſt thoſe ſacred things which they affected outwardly to deſpiſe as mere *bugbears*, while perhaps they could not help inwardly trembling before them as realities. For a while, the native rectitude of his underſtanding, and the excellent principles in which his infancy had been educated, withſtood every temptation to intemperance or impiety. Alas! it was not always ſo.—He was even in the firſt years of his riſing youth, an ardent lover: feeling the paſſion, not affected, light, and ſportive; but ſolemn, anxious, fervent, abſorbing the whole ſoul; ſuch as it is deſcribed by Thomſon in his enrapturing poem on *Spring*. When his heart was firſt ſtruck by the charms of village beauty; the *love* he felt was pure, tender, and ſincere, as that of the youth and maiden in his own *Cottar's Saturday's Night*. If the ardour of his paſſion hurried him afterwards to triumph over the

the chaſtity of the maid he loved; the tenderneſs of his heart, the manly honeſty of his ſoul, ſoon made him offer, with eager ſolicitude, to repair by marriage the injury of love.

About this time in the progreſs of his life and character, did he firſt begin to be publicly diſtinguiſhed as a poet. A *maſonic* ſong, a ſatirical epigram, a rhyming epiſtle to a friend, attempted with ſucceſs; taught him to know his own powers, and gave him confidence to try taſks more arduous, and which ſhould command ſtill higher applauſe. The annual celebration of the *Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*, in the rural pariſhes of Scotland, has much in it of thoſe old *Popiſh* feſtivals, in which ſuperſtition, traffic, and amuſement, uſed to be ſtrangely intermingled. Burns ſaw, and ſeized, in it, one of the happieſt of all ſubjects, to afford ſcope for the diſplay—of that ſtrong and piercing ſagacity by which he could almoſt intuitively diſtinguiſh the reaſonable from the abſurd, and the becoming from the ridiculous;—of that pictureſque power of fancy, which enabled him to repreſent ſcenes, and perſons, and groupes, and looks, attitudes, and geſtures, in a manner

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almoſt as lively and impreſſive, even in words, as if all the artifices and energies of the pencil had been employed;—of that knowledge which he had neceſſarily acquired of the manners, paſſions, and prejudices of the ruſtics around him, of whatever was ridiculous, no leſs than of whatever was affectingly beautiful, in rural life. A thouſand prejudices of *Popiſh*, and perhaps too of ruder *Pagan* ſuperſtition, have from time immemorial, been connected in the minds of the *Scottiſh* peaſantry, with the annual recurrence of the *Eve of the Feſtival of all the Saints*, or *Hallowe'en*. Theſe were all intimately known to BURNS, and had made a powerful impreſſion upon his imagination and feelings. Chooſing them for the ſubject of a poem, he produced a piece, which is, almoſt to frenzy, the delight of thoſe who are beſt acquainted with its ſubject; and which will not fail to preſerve the memory of the prejudices and uſages which it deſcribes, when they ſhall, perhaps, have ceaſed to give one merry evening in the year to the cottage fire-ſide. The ſimple joys, the honeſt love, the ſincere friendſhip, the ardent devotion of the cottage; whatever in the more ſolemn part of the ruſtic's life is humble and artleſs,

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without being mean or unſeemly; or tender and dignified, without aſpiring to ſtilted grandeur, or to unnatural, buſkined pathos; had deeply impreſſed the imagination of the riſing poet; had in ſome ſort wrought itſelf into the very texture of the fibres of his ſoul. He tried to expreſs in verſe what he moſt tenderly felt, what he moſt enthuſiaſtically imagined; and compoſed the *Cottar's Saturday's Night.*

THESE pieces, the true effuſions of genius, informed by reading and obſervation, and prompted by its own native ardour, as well as by friendly applauſe; were ſoon communicated from one to another among the moſt diſcerning of BURNS's acquaintance; and were, by every new reader, peruſed and re-peruſed with an eagerneſs of delight and approbation, which would not ſuffer him long to withhold them from the preſs. A *ſubſcription* was propoſed; was earneſtly promoted by ſome gentlemen, who were glad to intereſt themſelves in behalf of ſuch ſignal poetical merit; was ſoon crowded with the names of a conſiderable number of the inhabitants of Ayrſhire; who, in the proffered purchaſe, ſought not leſs to gratify their own paſſion for *Scottiſh* poeſy, than to encourage the

the wonderful ploughman. At the manufacturing village of KILMARNOCK were the poems of BURNS, for the firſt time, printed. The whole edition was quickly diſtributed over the country.

THEY were every where received with eager admiration and delight. They eminently poſſeſſed all thoſe qualities which never fail to render any literary work quickly and permanently popular. They were written in a phraſeology, of which all the powers were univerſally felt; and which, being at once, *antique*, *familiar*, and now *rarely written*, was hence fitted for all the dignified and pictureſque uſes of poetry, without being diſagreeably obſcure. The imagery, and the ſentiments, were, at once, faithfully natural, and irreſiſtibly impreſſive and intereſting. Thoſe topics of ſatire and ſcandal in which the ruſtic delights; that *humorous* imitation of character, and that *witty* aſſociation of ideas familiar and ſtriking but not naturally allied to one another, which have force to ſhake his ſides with laughter; thoſe fancies of ſuperſtition at which he ſtill wonders and trembles; thoſe affecting ſentiments and images of true religion, which are at once dear and awful to his heart; were all repreſented by BURNS with all

all a poet's magic power. Old and young, high and low, grave and gay, learned or ignorant, all were alike delighted, agitated, transported. I was at that time resident in *Galloway*, contiguous to *Ayrshire*: and I can well remember, how that even plough-boys and maid-servants would have gladly bestowed the wages which they earned the most hardly, and which they wanted to purchase necessary clothing, if they might but procure the works of BURNS. A copy happened to be presented from a gentleman in Ayrshire to a friend in my neighbourhood. He put it into my hands, as a work containing some effusions of the most extraordinary genius. I took it, rather that I might not disoblige the lender, than from any ardour of curiosity or expectation. "An unlettered ploughman, a poet!" said I, with contemptuous incredulity. It was on a Saturday evening. I opened the volume, by accident, while I was undressing, to go to bed. I closed it not, till a late hour on the rising Sunday morn, after I had read over every syllable it contained. And,

Ex illo Corydon, Corydon est tempore nobis!

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In the mean time, ſome few copies of theſe faſcinating poems found their way to Edinburgh: and one was communicated to the late amiable and ingenious Dr. Thomas Blacklock. There was, perhaps, never one among all mankind whom you might more truly have called *an angel upon earth* than Dr. Blacklock! He was guileleſs and innocent as a child, yet endowed with manly ſagacity and penetration. His heart was a perpetual ſpring of overflowing benignity. His feelings were all tremblingly alive to the ſenſe of the ſublime, the beautiful, the tender, the pious, the virtuous. Poetry was to him the dear ſolace of perpetual blindneſs. Cheerfulneſs, even to gaiety, was, notwithſtanding that irremediable misfortune under which he laboured, long the predominant colour of his mind. In his latter years, when the gloom might otherwiſe have thickened around him, hope, faith, devotion the moſt fervent and ſublime, exalted his mind to heaven, and made him ſtill maintain much of his wonted cheerfulneſs in the expectation of a ſpeedy diſſolution.

This amiable man of genius read the poems of Burns with a nice perception, with a keenly

ly impaſſioned feeling of all their beauties. Amid that tumult of emotions of benevolence, curioſity, and admiration, which were thus excited in his boſom; he eagerly addreſſed ſome encouraging verſes to the ruſtic bard; which, conveying the praiſes of a poet, and a judge of poetical compoſition; were much more grateful to BURNS, than any applauſes he had before received from others. It was BLACKLOCK's invitation that finally determined him to abandon his firſt intentions of going abroad to the Weſt Indies; and rather to repair to Edinburgh, with his book, in hopes, there to find ſome powerful patron, and, perhaps, to make his fortune by his poetry.

IN the beginning of the winter 1786-87, BURNS came to Edinburgh. By Dr. BLACKLOCK he was received with the moſt flattering kindneſs; and was earneſtly introduced to every perſon of taſte and generoſity among the good old man's friends. It was little BLACKLOCK had in his power to do, for a brother poet. But, that little he did with a fond alacrity, and with a modeſt grace, which made it ten times more pleaſing, and more effectually uſeful to

him, in whoſe favour it was exerciſed, than even the very ſame ſervices would have been from almoſt any other benefactor. Others ſoon interpoſed to ſhare with BLACKLOCK in the honour of patronizing BURNS. He had brought, from his Ayrſhire friends, ſome letters of recommendation. Some of his rural acquaintance coming, as well as himſelf, to Edinburgh for the winter, did him what offices of kindneſs they conveniently could. Thoſe very few, who poſſeſſed at once true taſte and ardent philanthropy, were ſoon earneſtly united in his praiſe. They who were diſpoſed to favour any good thing belonging to Scotland, purely becauſe it was Scottiſh, gladly joined the cry. Thoſe who had hearts and underſtandings to be charmed, without knowing why, when they ſaw their native cuſtoms, manners, and language, made the ſubjects and the materials of poeſy, could not ſuppreſs that voice of feeling which ſtruggled to declare itſelf for BURNS. For the diſſipated, the licentious, the malignant wits, and the free-thinkers, he was ſo unfortunate as to have ſatire, and obſcenity, and ridicule of things ſacred, ſufficient to captivate their fancies. Even for the pious, he had paſſages in which the inſpired language of devotion might ſeem to come

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mended from his tongue. And then, to charm thoſe whom nought can charm—but wonders; whoſe taſte leads them to admire only ſuch things as a juggler eating fire; a perſon who can converſe as if his organs of ſpeech were in his belly; a lame ſailor writing with his toes, for want of fingers; a peer or a ploughman making verſes; a ſmall coal-man directing a concert;—why, to thoſe people, the Ayrſhire poet might ſeem preciſely one of the moſt wonderful of the wonders after which they were wont to gape.—Thus did BURNS, ere he had been many weeks in Edinburgh, find himſelf the object of univerſal curioſity, favour, admiration, and fondneſs. He was ſought after, courted with attentions the moſt reſpectful and aſſiduous, feaſted, flattered, careſſed by all ranks, as the firſt boaſt of our country; whom it was ſcarcely poſſible to honour and reward to a degree equal to his merits. In compariſon with the general favour which now promiſed to more than crown his moſt ſanguine hopes, it could hardly be called *praiſe* at all, which he had obtained in Ayrſhire.

IN this poſture of our poet's affairs, a new edition of his poems was earneſtly called for. He

ſold the copy-right to Mr CREECH, for one hundred pounds. But, his friends, at the ſame time, ſuggeſted, and actively promoted *a ſubſcription* for an edition to be publiſhed for the benefit of the author, ere the bookſeller's right ſhould commence. Thoſe gentlemen who had formerly entertained the public of Edinburgh with the periodical publication of the papers of the MIRROR; having again combined their talents in producing the LOUNGER; were, at this time, about to conclude this laſt ſeries of papers. Yet, before the LOUNGER relinquiſhed his pen, he dedicated *a number* to a commendatory criticiſm of the poems of the Ayrſhire bard. That criticiſm is now known to have been compoſed by HENRY MACKENZIE, ESQ.; whoſe writings are univerſally admired for an *Addiſonian* delicacy and felicity of wit and humour, by which the CLIO of the *SPECTATOR* is more than rivalled; for a wildly tender pathos that excites the moſt exquiſite vibrations of the fineſt chords of ſympathy in the human heart; for a lofty, vehement, perſuaſive eloquence, by which the immortal *JUNIUS* has been ſometimes perhaps excelled, and often almoſt equalled! The ſubſcription-papers were rapidly filled. The ladies, eſpecially, vied with one another—who ſhould be the firſt

firſt to ſubſcribe, who ſhould procure the greateſt number of other ſubſcribers, for the poems of a bard who was now, for ſome moments, the idol of faſhion. The *Caledonian Hunt*, a gay *club*, compoſed of the moſt opulent and faſhionable young men in Scotland, profeſſed themſelves the patrons of the Scottiſh poet, and eagerly encouraged the propoſed republication of his poems. Six ſhillings were all the ſubſcription-money demanded for each copy. But many voluntarily paid half-a-guinea, a guinea, or two guineas. And it was ſuppoſed that the poet might derive from the ſubſcription, and the ſale of his copy-right, a clear profit of, at leaſt, ſeven hundred pounds; a ſum that, to a man who had hitherto lived in his indigent circumſtances, would be abſolutely more than the vainly expected wealth of Sir Epicure Mammon!

Burns, in the mean time, led a life differing from that of his original condition in Ayrſhire, almoſt as widely as differed the ſcenes and amuſements of London, to which Omiah was introduced, under the patronage of the Earl of Sandwich, from thoſe to which he had been familiar in the Friendly Iſles. The converſation of even the moſt eminent authors, is often found

to be ſo unequal to the fame of their writings, that he who *read* with admiration, can *liſten* with none but ſentiments of the moſt profound contempt. But, the converſation of BURNS was, in compariſon with the *formal* and *exterior* circumſtances of his education, perhaps even more wonderful than his poetry. He affected no ſoft airs, no graceful motions of politeneſs, which might have ill accorded with the ruſtic plainneſs of his native manners. Conſcious ſuperiority of mind taught him to aſſociate with the great, the learned, and the gay, without being over-awed into any ſuch baſhfulneſs as might have made him confuſed in thought, or heſitating in elocution. He poſſeſſed, withal, an extraordinary ſhare of plain common ſenſe, or *mother-wit*, which prevented him from obtruding upon perſons, of whatever rank, with whom he was admitted to converſe, any of thoſe effuſions of vanity, envy, or ſelf-conceit, in which authors are exceedingly apt to indulge, who have lived remote from the general practice of life, and whoſe minds have been almoſt excluſively confined to contemplate their own ſtudies and their own works. In converſation he diſplayed a kind of intuitive quickneſs and rectitude of judgment upon every ſubject that aroſe. The

ſenſibility

ſenſibility of his heart, and the vivacity of his fancy, gave a rich colouring to whatever reaſoning he was diſpoſed to advance: and his language in common diſcourſe, was not at all leſs happy than in his writings. For theſe reaſons, he did not ceaſe to pleaſe immediately after he had been once ſeen. Thoſe who had met and converſed with him once, were pleaſed to meet and converſe with him again and again. I remember, that the late Dr. ROBERTSON once obſerved to me, that he had ſcarcely ever met with any man whoſe converſation diſcovered greater vigour and activity of mind than did that of BURNS. Every one wondered that the ruſtic bard was not *ſpoiled* by ſo much careſſing, favour, and flattery as he found: and every one went on to *ſpoil* him, by continually repeating all theſe, as if with an obſtinate reſolution that they ſhould, in the end, produce their effect. Nothing, however, of change in his manners, appeared, at leaſt for a while,—to ſhow that this was at all likely to happen. He, indeed, maintained himſelf with conſiderable ſpirit, upon a footing of equality with all with whom he had occaſion to aſſociate or converſe. Yet he never arrogated any ſuperiority, ſave what the fair and manly exertion of his powers, at the time, could undeniably

niably command. Had he but been able to give a ſteady preference to the ſociety of the virtuous, the learned, and the wiſe, rather than to that of the gay and the diſſolute; it is probable that he could not have failed to riſe to an exaltation of character and of talents fitted to do high honour to human nature.

UNFORTUNATELY, however, that happened which was natural in thoſe unaccuſtomed circumſtances in which BURNS found himſelf placed. He could not aſſume enough of ſuperciliouſneſs, to reject the familiarity of all thoſe who, without any ſincere kindneſs for him, importunately preſſed to obtain his acquaintance and intimacy. He was inſenſibly led to aſſociate leſs with the learned, the auſtere, and the rigorouſly temperate, than with the young, with the votaries of intemperate joys, with perſons to whom he was recommended chiefly by licentious wit, and with whom he could not long aſſociate without ſharing in the exceſſes of their debauchery. Even in the country, men of this ſort had begun to faſten on him, and to ſeduce him to embelliſh the groſs pleaſures of their looſer hours with the charms of his wit and fancy.

And

And yet, I have been informed by Mr ARTHUR BRUCE, a gentleman of great worth and diſcernment, to whom BURNS was, in his earlier days, well known; that he had, in thoſe times, ſeen the poet ſteadily reſiſt ſuch ſolicitations and allurements to exceſs in convivial enjoyment, as ſcarcely any other perſon could have withſtood. But, the enticements of pleaſure too often unman our virtuous reſolution, even while we wear the air of rejecting them with a ſtern brow. We reſiſt, and reſiſt, and reſiſt; but, at laſt, ſuddenly turn and paſſionately embrace the enchantreſs. The *bucks* of Edinburgh accompliſhed, in regard to BURNS, that in which the *boors* of Ayrſhire had failed. After reſiding ſome months in Edinburgh, he began to eſtrange himſelf, not altogether, but in ſome meaſure, from the ſociety of his graver friends. Too many of his hours were now ſpent at the tables of perſons who delighted to urge conviviality to drunkenneſs, in the tavern, in the brothel, on the lap of the woman of pleaſure. He *ſuffered* himſelf to be ſurrounded by a race of miſerable beings who were proud to tell; that they had been in company with BURNS; and had ſeen BURNS as looſe and as fooliſh as themſelves.

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He was not yet irrecoverably loſt to temperance and moderation: but he was already almoſt too much captivated with their wanton rivals, to be ever more won back to a faithful attachment to *their* more ſober charms. He now alſo began to contract ſomething of new arrogance in converſation. Accuſtomed to be, among his favourite aſſociates, what is vulgarly but expreſſively called, *the cock of the company;* he could ſcarcely refrain from indulging in ſimilar freedom and dictatorial deciſion of talk, even in the preſence of perſons who could leſs patiently endure his preſumption.

THUS paſſed two winters, and an intervening ſummer, of the life of BURNS. The ſubſcription-edition of his poems, in the mean time, appeared; and, although not enlarged beyond that which came from the *Kilmarnock* preſs, by many new pieces of eminent merit, did not fail to give entire ſatisfaction to the ſubſcribers. He at one time, during this period, accompanied, for a few weeks, into *Berwickſhire*, *Robert Ainſlie*, *Eſq.*–a gentleman of the pureſt and more correct manners, who was accuſtomed ſometimes to ſoothe the toils of a laborious profeſſion, by an occaſional

occaſional converſe with polite literature, and with general ſcience. At another time, he wandered on a jaunt of four or five weeks, through the *Highlands*, in company with the late Mr WILLIAM NICOL; a man who had been before the companion and friend of Dr. GILBERT STUART; who in vigour of intellect, and in wild, yet generous, impetuoſity of paſſion, remarkably reſembled both STUART and BURNS; who, for his ſkill and facility of Latin compoſition, was perhaps without a rival in Europe; whoſe virtues and genius were clouded by habits of Bachanalian exceſs; whoſe latter years were vexatiouſly embittered by a conteſt with a perſon of far meaner talents, and narrower intelligence; who by the moſt unwearied and extraordinary profeſſional toil, in the midſt of as perſevering diſſipation, by which alone it was at any time interrupted, won and accumulated an honourable and ſufficient competence for his family; and, alas! who died, within theſe few weeks, of a jaundice, with a complication of other complaints, the effects of long-continued intemperance! So much did the zeal of friendſhip, and the ambition of honeſt

fame,

ſame, predominate in NICOL's mind; that he was, in his laſt hours, exceedingly pained by the thought that ſince he had ſurvived BURNS, there remained none who might reſcue his mixed character from miſrepreſentation, and might embalm his memory in never-dying verſe!

IN their excurſion, BURNS and his friend NICOL were naturally led to viſit the intereſting ſcenery adjacent to the duke of Athol's ſeat at *Dunkeld*, on the banks of the Tay. While they were in a contiguous inn, the duke, accidentally informed of Mr. BURNS's arrival ſo near, invited him, by a polite meſſage, to *Dunkeld-houſe*. BURNS did not fail to attend his obliging inviter; was received with flattering condeſcenſion; made himſelf ſufficiently agreeable by his converſation and manners; was detained for a day or two by his Grace's kind hoſpitality; and, ere he departed, in a poetical petition, in the name of the river *Bruar*, which falls into the Tay, within the duke's pleaſure-grounds at *Blair-Athol*; ſuggeſted ſome new improvements of taſte, which I believe to have been ſince happily made, in compliance with his advice. I relate this little incident, to do honour rather

to

to the duke of Athol, than to BURNS: for, if I be not exceedingly miſtaken, nothing that hiſtory can record of George the Third, will in future times, be accounted more honourable to his memory, than the circumſtances and the converſation of his well-known interview with Dr. Johnſon. The two congenial companions, BURNS and NICOL; after viſiting many other of thoſe romantic, pictureſque, and ſublime ſcenes, of which the fame attracts travellers of taſte to the Highlands of Scotland; after fondly lingering here and there for a day or two at a favourite inn; returned at laſt to Edinburgh: and BURNS was now to cloſe accompts with his bookſeller, and to retire with his profits in his pocket to the country.

Mr CREECH has obligingly informed me, that the whole ſum paid to the poet for the copyright, and for the ſubſcription copies of his book, amounted to nearly eleven hundred pounds. Out of this ſum, indeed, the expences of printing the edition for the ſubſcribers, were to be deducted. I have likewiſe reaſon to believe, that he had conſumed a much larger proportion of theſe gains, than prudence could approve; while

while he ſuperintended the impreſſion, paid his court to his patrons, and waited the full payment of the ſubſcription-money.

He was now at laſt to fix upon a plan for his future life. He talked loudly of independence of ſpirit, and ſimplicity of manners; and boaſted his reſolution to return to the plough. Yet, ſtill he lingered in Edinburgh, week after week, and month after month; perhaps expecting that one or another of his noble patrons might procure him ſome permanent and competent annual income, which ſhould ſet him above all neceſſity of future exertions to earn for himſelf the means of ſubſiſtence; perhaps unconſciouſly reluctant to quit the pleaſures of that voluptuous town-life to which he had for ſome time too willingly accuſtomed himſelf. An accidental diſlocation or fracture of an arm or a leg, confining him for ſome weeks to his apartment, left him, during this time, leiſure for ſerious reflection: and he determined to retire from the town, without longer delay. None of all his patrons interpoſed to divert him from his purpoſe of returning to the plough, by the offer of any ſmall penſion, or any ſinecure place of moderate emolument, ſuch

ſuch as might have given him competence without withdrawing him from his poetical ſtudies. It ſeemed to be forgotten, that a ploughman thus exalted into a man of letters, was unfitted for his former toils, without being regularly qualified to enter the career of any new profeſſion; and that it became incumbent upon thoſe patrons who had called him from the plough, not merely to make him their companion in the hour of riot, not ſimply to fill his purſe with gold for a few tranſient expences; but to ſecure him, as far as was poſſible, from being ever over-whelmed in diſtreſs, in conſequence of the favour which they had ſhown him, and of the habits of life into which they had ſeduced him. Perhaps, indeed, the ſame deluſion of fancy betrayed both BURNS and his patrons into the miſtaken idea that, after all which had paſſed, it was ſtill poſſible for him to return, in cheerful content, to the homely joys and ſimple toils of undiſſipated rural life.

IN this temper of BURNS's mind, in this ſtate of his fortune, a *farm* and the *exciſe* were the objects upon which his choice ultimately fixed for future employment and ſupport. Mr. ALEXAN-

DER WOOD, the ſurgeon who attended him during the illneſs occaſioned by his hurt; no ſooner underſtood his patient's wiſh, to ſeek a reſource in the ſervice of the *exciſe*; than he, with the uſual activity of his benevolence, effectually recommended the poet to the commiſſioners of exciſe: and the name of BURNS was enrolled in the liſt of their *expectant-officers*. PETER MILLAR, Eſq. of *Dalſwinton*, deceived, like BURNS himſelf, and BURNS's other friends, into an idea, that the poet and exciſeman might yet be reſpectable and happy as a farmer; generouſly propoſed to eſtabliſh him in a farm, upon conditions of leaſe, which prudence and induſtry might eaſily render exceedingly advantageous. BURNS eagerly accepted the offers of this benevolent patron. Two of the poet's friends from *Ayrſhire*, were invited to ſurvey that farm in *Dumfriesſhire*, which Mr. MILLAR offered. A leaſe was granted to the poetical farmer, at the annual rent which his own friends declared, that the due cultivation of his farm might eaſily enable him to pay. What yet remained of the profits of his publication, was laid out in the purchaſe of farm-ſtock. And Mr. MILLAR might, for ſome ſhort time, pleaſe himſelf with the perſuaſion, that

that he had approved himſelf the liberal patron of genius; had acquired a good tenant upon his eſtate; and had placed a deſerving man in the very ſituation in which alone he himſelf deſired to be placed, in order to be happy to his wiſhes.

Burns, with his Jane, whom he now married, took up their reſidence upon his farm. The neighbouring farmers and gentlemen, pleaſed to obtain for an inmate among them, the poet by whoſe works they had been delighted; kindly ſought his company, and invited him to their houſes. He found an inexpreſſible charm in ſitting down, beſide his wife, at his own fire-ſide; in wandering over his own grounds; in once more putting his hand to the ſpade and the plough; in forming his incloſures, and managing his cattle. For ſome moments, he felt almoſt all that felicity which fancy had taught him to expect in his new ſituation. He had been, for a time, idle: but his muſcles were not yet unbraced for rural toil. He had been admitted to flatter ladies of faſhion; he had been occaſionally ſeduced by the allurements of venal beauty: But, he now ſeemed to find a joy in being the huſband of the miſtreſs of his affections, in ſeeing himſelf the

father of her children, ſuch as might promiſe to attach him for ever to that modeſt, humble, domeſtic life in which alone he could hope to be permanently happy. Even his engagements in the ſervice of the exciſe, did not at the very firſt, threaten neceſſarily to debaſe him by aſſociation with the mean, the groſs, and the profligate, to contaminate the poet, or to ruin the farmer.

But, it could not be. It was not poſſible for Burns now to aſſume that ſoberneſs of fancy and paſſions, that ſedateneſs of feeling, thoſe habits of earneſt attention to groſs and vulgar cares, without which, ſucceſs in his new ſituation was not to be expected. A thouſand difficulties were to be encountered and overcome, much money was to be expended, much weary toil was to be exerciſed, before his farm could be brought into a ſtate of cultivation, in which its produce might enrich the occupier. The proſpect before him, was, in this reſpect, ſuch as might well have diſcouraged the moſt ſtubbornly laborious peaſant, the moſt ſanguine projector in agriculture. Much more, therefore, was it likely, that this proſpect ſhould quickly diſhearten Burns;

who

who had never loved labour; and who was, at this time, certainly not at all diſpoſed to enter into agriculture with the enthuſiaſm of a projector. Beſide all this, I have reaſon to believe, that the poet had made his bargain raſhly, and had not duely availed himſelf of his patron's generoſity. His friends from Ayrſhire, were little acquainted with the ſoil, with the manures, with the markets, with the dairies, with the modes of improvement in Dumfriesſhire. They had ſet upon his farm, rather ſuch a value of rental, as it might have borne in Ayrſhire, than that which it could eaſily afford in the local circumſtances in which it was actually placed. He himſelf had inconſiderately ſubmitted to their judgment, without once doubting whether they might not have erred againſt his intereſts, without the ſlighteſt wiſh to make a bargain artfully advantageous for himſelf. And the neceſſary conſequence was, that he held his farm at too high a rent, contrary to his landlord's intention.—The buſineſs of the exciſe too, as he began to be more and more employed in it, diſtracted his mind from the care of his farm, led him into groſs and vulgar ſociety, and expoſed him to many unavoidable temptations to drunken exceſs, ſuch as

he had no longer ſufficient fortitude to reſiſt. Amidſt the anxieties, diſtractions, and ſeducements, which thus aroſe to him; home became inſenſibly leſs and leſs pleaſing; even the endearments of his JANE's affection began to loſe their hold on his heart; he became every day leſs and leſs unwilling to forget in riot thoſe gathering ſorrows which he knew not to ſubdue.

MR. MILLAR, and ſome others of his friends, would gladly have exerted an influence over his mind, which might have preſerved him, in this ſituation of his affairs, equally from deſpondency, and from diſſipation. But BURNS's temper ſpurned all controul from his ſuperiors in fortune. He reſented, as an arrogant encroachment upon his independence, that tenor of conduct by which Mr. MILLAR wiſhed to turn him from diſſolute conviviality, to that ſteady attention to the buſineſs of his farm, without which it was impoſſible to thrive in it. In the neighbourhood were other gentlemen occaſionally addicted, like BURNS, to convivial exceſs; who, while they admired the poet's talents, and were charmed with his licentious wit; forgot the care of his real intereſts in the pleaſure which they found

in

in his company, and in the gratification which the plenty and feſtivity of their tables appeared evidently to afford him. With theſe gentlemen, while diſappointments and diſguſts continued to multiply upon him in his preſent ſituation, he perſiſted to aſſociate every day more and more eagerly. His croſſes and diſſapointments drove him every day more and more into diſſipation; and his diſſipation tended to enhance whatever was diſagreeable and perplexing in the ſtate of his affairs. He ſank, by degrees, into the boon companion of mere exciſemen: and almoſt every drunken fellow, who was willing to ſpend his money laviſhly in the ale-houſe, could eaſily command the company of BURNS. The care of his farm was thus neglected: Waſte and loſſes wholly conſumed his little capital: He reſigned his leaſe into the hands of his landlord; and retired, with his family, to the town of Dumfries: Determining to depend entirely for the means of future ſupport upon his income as an exciſe-officer.

YET, during this unfortunate period of his life, which paſſed between his departure from Edinburgh to ſettle in Dumfriesſhire, and his leaving the country in order to take up his reſidence in

the town of Dumfries, the energy and activity of his intellectual powers appears to have been not at all impaired. He made a collection of Scottiſh ſongs, which were publiſhed, the words with the muſic, by a Mr JOHNSTONE, an engraver, in Edinburgh, in three ſmall volumes, in octavo. In making this collection, he, in many inſtances, accommodated new verſes to the old tunes, with admirable felicity and ſkill. He compoſed ſeveral other poems, ſuch as the tale of *Tam o'Shanter*, the *Whiſtle*, *Verſes on a wounded Hare*, the *Pathetic Addreſs to R*** G*** of F****, and ſome others which he afterwards permitted Mr. CREECH to inſert in the *fourth* and *fifth* editions of his poems. He aſſiſted in the temporary inſtitution of a ſmall ſubſcription-library, for the uſe of a number of the well-diſpoſed peaſants in his neighbourhood. He readily aided, and by his knowledge of genuine Scottiſh phraſeology and manners, greatly enlightened, the antiquarian reſearches of the late ingenious Captain GROSE. He ſtill carried on an epiſtolary correſpondence, ſometimes gay, ſportive, humorous, but always enlivened by bright flaſhes of genius, with a number of his old friends, and on a very wide

diverſity

diverſity of topics. At times, as it ſhould ſeem from his writings of this period, he reflected, with inexpreſſible heart-bitterneſs, on the high hopes from which he had fallen; on the errors of moral conduct, into which he had been hurried, by the ardour of his ſoul, and, in ſome meaſure, by the very generoſity of his nature; on the diſgrace and wretchedneſs into which he ſaw himſelf rapidly ſinking; on the ſorrow with which his miſconduct oppreſſed the heart of his JANE; on the want and deſtitute miſery in which it ſeemed probable that he muſt leave her and their infants. Nor, amidſt theſe agonizing reflections, did he fail to look, with an indignation half invidious, half contemptuous, on thoſe, who, with moral habits not more excellent than his, with powers of intellect far inferior, yet baſked in the ſun-ſhine of fortune, and were loaded with the wealth and honours of the world, while *his* follies could not obtain pardon, nor his wants an honourable ſupply. His wit became, from this time, more gloomily ſarcaſtic; and his converſation and writings began to aſſume ſomething of a tone of miſanthropical malignity, by which they had not been before, in any eminent degree,

gree, diſtinguiſhed. But, with all theſe failings; he was ſtill that exalted mind which had raiſed itſelf above the depreſſion of its original condition, with all the energy of *the lion, pawing to ſet free his hinder limbs from the yet incumbering earth:* He ſtill appeared *not leſs than archangel ruined!*

What more remains there for me to relate? In Dumfries his diſſipation became ſtill more deeply habitual. He was here expoſed more than in the country, to be ſolicited to ſhare the riot of the diſſolute and the idle. Fooliſh young men, ſuch as writers' apprentices, young ſurgeons, merchants' clerks, and his brother exciſemen, flocked eagerly about him, and from time to time preſſed him to drink with them, that they might enjoy his wicked wit. His friend Nicol made one or two autumnal excurſions to Dumfries: and when they met in Dumfries, friendſhip, and genius, and wanton wit, and good liquor could never fail to keep Burns and Nicol together, till both the one and the other were as dead drunk as ever Silenus was. The *Caledonian Club*, too, and the *Dumfriesſhire and Galloway Hunt*, had occaſional meetings in Dumfries, after

ter Burns came to reſide here: and the poet was, of courſe, invited to ſhare their conviviality, and heſitated not to accept the invitation. The morals of the town were, in conſequence of its becoming ſo much the ſcene of public amuſement, not a little corrupted: and, though a huſband and a father, poor Burns did not eſcape ſuffering by the general contamination, in a manner which I forbear to deſcribe. In the intervals between his different fits of intemperance, he ſuffered ſtill the keeneſt anguiſh of remorſe and horribly afflictive foreſight. His Jane ſtill behaved with a degree of maternal and conjugal tenderneſs and prudence, which made him feel more bitterly the evil of his miſconduct, although they could not reclaim him. At laſt, crippled, emaciated, having the very power of animation waſted by diſeaſe, quite broken-hearted by the ſenſe of his errors, and of the hopeleſs miſeries in which he ſaw himſelf and his family depreſſed; with his ſoul ſtill tremblingly alive to the ſenſe of ſhame, and to the love of virtue; yet even in the laſt feebleneſs, and amid the laſt agonies of expiring life, yielding readily to any temptation that offered the ſemblance of intemperate enjoyment; he died at Dumfries, in the ſummer of the year 1796

1796, while he was yet three or four years under the age of forty.

After his death, it quickly appeared that his failings had not effaced from the minds of his more reſpectable acquaintance, either the regard which had once been won by his ſocial qualities, or the reverence due to his intellectual talents. The circumſtances of want in which he left his family, were noticed by the gentlemen of Dumfries, with earneſt commiſeration. His funeral was celebrated, by the care of his friends, with a decent ſolemnity, and with a numerous attendance of mourners, ſufficiently honourable to his memory. Several copies of verſes, having, if *no other merit, at leaſt that of a good ſubject;* were inſerted in different newſpapers, upon the occaſion of his death. A contribution by ſubſcription, was propoſed, in order to raiſe a ſmall fund, for the decent ſupport of his widow, and the education of his infant children. This ſubſcription has been very warmly promoted, and not without conſiderable ſucceſs, by *John Syme* Eſq. of Dumfries; by *Alexander Cunningham*, Eſq. in Edinburgh; and by Dr *James Currie* and Mr *Roſcoe* of

of Liverpool. Mr *Stephen Kemble*, manager of the theatre-royal at Edinburgh, with ready liberality, gave a benefit-night for this generous purpose. A publication of the poet's posthumous works is now in preparation, the profits of which are to be appropriated to the same pious use. It is hoped, that such a sum may be made up, in all, as shall secure his widow from destitute want, and shall bestow upon his children the advantages of a liberal education. It will be rather a tribute to BURNS, than the mere dole of charity.

I SHALL conclude this paper with a short estimate of what appear to me to have been BURNS's real merits, as a poet and as a man.

The most remarkable quality he displayed, both in his writings and his conversation, was, certainly, an enlarged, vigorous, keenly discerning, COMPREHENSION OF MIND. Whatever be the subject of his verse; he seems still to grasp it with giant force; to wield and turn it with easy dexterity; to view it on all sides, with an eye which no turn of outline and no hue of colouring can elude; to mark all its relations to the group of surrounding objects; and

and then to ſelect what he chooſes to repreſent to our imaginations, with a ſkilful and happy propriety, which ſhows him to have been, at the ſame time, maſter of all the reſt. It will not be very eaſy for any other mind, however richly ſtored with various knowledge; for any other imagination, however elaſtic and inventive; to find any new and ſuitable topic that has been omitted by BURNS, in celebrating the ſubjects of all his greater and more elaborate poems. It is impoſſible to conſider, without aſtoniſhment, that amazing fertility of invention which is diſplayed, under the regulation of a ſound judgment, and a correct taſte, in the pieces intituled *the Twa Dogs; the Addreſs to the De'il; Scotch Drink; the Holy Fair; Hallowe'en; the Cottar's Saturday Night; To a Haggis; To a Louſe; To a Mountain Daiſy; Tam O'Shanter; on Captain Groſe's Peregrinations; The humble Petition of Bruar water; The Bard's Epitaph.* Shoemakers, footmen, threſhers, milk-maids, peers, ſtaymakers, have all written verſes, ſuch as deſervedly attracted the notice of the world. But in the poetry of theſe people, while there was commonly ſome genuine effuſion of the ſentiments of agitated nature, ſome exhibition of ſuch imagery

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as at once impreſſed itſelf upon the heart; there was alſo ever much to be excuſed in conſideration of their ignorance, their want of taſte, their extravagance of fancy, their want or abuſe of the advantages of a liberal education. BURNS has no pardon to demand for defects of this ſort. He might ſcorn every conceſſion which we are ready to grant to his peculiar circumſtances, without being, on this account, reduced to relinquiſh any part of his claims to the praiſe of poetical excellence. He touches his lyre, at all times, with the hand of a maſter. He demands to be ranked, not with the WOODHOUSES, the DUCKS, the RAMSAYS, but with the MILTONS, the POPES, the GRAYS. No poet was ever more largely endowed with that ſtrong common ſenſe which is neceſſarily the very ſource and principle of all fine writing.

THE next remarkable quality in this man's character, ſeems to have conſiſted in native ſtrength, ARDOUR, and delicacy OF FEELINGS, paſſions, and affections. *Si vis me flere; dolendum primum eſt ipſi tibi.* All that is valuable in poetry, and, at the ſame time, peculiar to it, conſiſts in the effuſion of particular, not general,

ral, *ſentiment*, and in the picturing out of particular *imagery*. But education, reading, a wide converſe with men in ſociety, the moſt extenſive obſervation of external nature, however uſeful to improve, cannot, even all combined, confer, the power of comprehending either *imagery* or *ſentiment*, with ſuch force and vivacity of conception, as may enable one to impreſs whatever he may chooſe upon the ſouls of others, with full, irreſiſtible, electric energy. This is a power which nought can beſtow, ſave native ſoundneſs, delicacy, quickneſs, ardour, force of thoſe parts of our bodily organization, of thoſe energies in the ſtructure of our minds, on which depend all our ſenſations, emotions, appetites, paſſions, and affections. Who ever knew a man of high original genius, whoſe ſenſes were imperfect, his feelings dull and callous, his paſſions all languid and ſtagnant, his affections without ardour, and without conſtancy? Others may be artiſans, ſpeculatiſts, imitators in the fine arts. None but the man who is thus richly endowed by nature, can be a poet, an artiſt, an illuſtrious inventor in philoſophy. Let any perſon *firſt* poſſeſs this original ſoundneſs, vigour, and delicacy of the primary energies of mind; and *then* let him receive

ceive ſome impreſſion upon his imagination, which ſhall excite a paſſion for this or that particular purſuit: he will ſcarcely fail to diſtinguiſh himſelf by illuſtrious efforts of exalted and original genius. Without having, *firſt*, thoſe ſimple ideas which belong, reſpectively, to the different ſenſes; no man can ever form for himſelf the complex notions, into the compoſition of which ſuch ſimple ideas neceſſarily enter. Never could BURNS, without this delicacy, this ſtrength, this vivacity of the powers of bodily ſenſation, and of mental feeling, which I would here claim as the indiſpenſible native endowments of true genius; without theſe, never could he have poured forth thoſe ſentiments, or pourtrayed thoſe images, which have ſo powerfully impreſſed every imagination, and penetrated every heart. Almoſt all the ſentiments and images diffuſed throughout the poems of BURNS, are freſh from the mint of nature. He ſings what he had himſelf beheld with intereſted attention,—what he had himſelf felt with keen emotions of pain or pleaſure. You actually ſee what he deſcribes: you more than ſympathize with his joys: your boſom is inflamed with all his fire: your heart dies away within you, in-

fected by the contagion of his deſpondency. He exalts, for a time, the genius of his reader to the elevation of his own; and, for the moment, confers upon him all the powers of a poet. Quotations were endleſs. But any perſon of diſcernment, taſte, and feeling, who ſhall carefully read over BURNS's book, will not fail to diſcover, in its every page, abundance of thoſe ſentiments and images to which this obſervation relates.—It is originality of genius, it is ſoundneſs of perception, it is delicacy of paſſion, it is general vigour and impetuoſity of the whole mind, by which ſuch effects are produced. Others have ſung, in the ſame Scottiſh dialect, and in ſimilar rhymes, many of the ſame topics which are celebrated by BURNS. But, what with BURNS awes or faſcinates; in the hands of others, only diſguſts by its deformity, or excites contempt by its meanneſs and unintereſting ſimplicity.

A *THIRD* quality which the life and the writings of BURNS ſhow to have belonged to his character, was, a quick and correct DISCERNMENT of the diſtinctions between RIGHT and WRONG, between TRUTH and FALSEHOOD; and this, accompanied

companied with a paſſionate preference of whatever was *right* and *true*, with an indignant abhorrence of whatever was *falſe* and morally *wrong*. It is true that he did not always ſteadily diſtinguiſh and eſchew the evils of drunkenneſs and licentious love; it is true that theſe, at times, ſeem to obtain even the approbation of his muſe. But there remains in his works enough to ſhow, that his cooler reaſon, and all his better feelings, earneſtly rejected thoſe gay vices, which he could ſometimes, unhappily, allow himſelf to practiſe, and would ſometimes recommend to others, by the charms which his imagination lent them. What was it but the clear and ardent diſcrimination of juſtice from injuſtice, which inſpired that indignation with which his heart often burned, when he ſaw thoſe exalted by fortune, who were not exalted by their merits? His *Cottar's Saturday Night*, and all his graver poems, breathe a rich vein of the moſt amiable, yet manly, and even delicately correct, morality. In his pieces of ſatire, and of lighter humour, it is ſtill upon the accurate and paſſionate diſcernment of falſehood, and of moral turpitude, that his ridicule turns. Other poets are often as remarkable for the incorrectneſs, or even the abſurdity of their general

general truths; as for intereſting ſublimity or tenderneſs of ſentiment, or for pictureſque ſplendour of imagery. BURNS is not leſs happy in teaching general truths, than in that diſplay of ſentiment and imagery, which more peculiarly belongs to the province of the poet. BURNS's morality deſerves this high praiſe; that it is not a ſyſtem merely of *diſcretion;* it is not founded upon any ſcheme of ſuperſtition; but ſeems to have always its ſource, and the teſt by which it is to be tried, in the moſt diffuſive benevolence, and in a regard for the univerſal good.

THE only other leading feature of character that appears to be ſtrikingly diſplayed in the life and writings of BURNS, is, *a lofty-minded* CONSCIOUSNESS *of his own* TALENTS *and* MERITS. Hence, the fierce and contemptuous aſperity of his ſatire; the ſullen and gloomy dignity of his complaints, addreſſed, not ſo much to alarm the ſoul of pity, as to reproach injuſtice, and to make fortunate baſeneſs ſhrink abaſhed; that general gravity and elevation of his ſentiments, which admits no humbly inſinuating ſportiveneſs of wit, which ſcorns all compromiſe between the *right* and the *expedient*, which decides with the authoritative

ritative voice of a judge from whom there is no appeal, upon characters, principles, and events, whenever they preſent themſelves to notice. From his works, as from his converſation and manners, *pride* ſeems to have excluded the effuſions of *vanity*. In the compoſition, or correction of his poetry, he never ſuffered the judgment, even of his moſt reſpectable friends, to dictate to him. This line in one of his poems, ("When I *look back* on *proſpects* drear") was criticiſed; but he would not condeſcend either to reply to the criticiſm, or to alter the expreſſion. Not a few of his ſmaller pieces are ſufficiently trivial, vulgar, and hackneyed in the thought, are ſuch as the pride of genius ſhould have diſdained to write, or, at leaſt, to publiſh. But there is reaſon to believe that he deſpiſed ſuch pieces, even while he wrote and publiſhed them; that it was rather in regard to the effects they had already produced upon hearers and readers, than from any overweening opinion of their intrinſic worth, he ſuffered them to be printed. His wit is always dignified. He is not a merry-andrew in a motley coat, ſporting before you for your diverſion: but a hero, or a philoſopher, deigning to admit you to witneſs his relaxations,

laxations; ſtill exerciſing the great energies of his ſoul; and little caring, at the moment, whether you do, or do not, cordially ſympathize with his feelings.

His *poems* may be all diſtributed into the two claſſes of *paſtorals* and *pieces upon common life and manners*. In the former claſs, I include all thoſe in which rural imagery, and the manners and ſentiments of ruſtics, are chiefly deſcribed. In the latter, I would comprehend his epigrams, epiſtles, and, in ſhort, all thoſe pieces in which the imagery and ſentiments are drawn from the condition and appearances of common life, without any particular reference to the country. It is in the firſt claſs, that the moſt excellent of his poems are certainly to be found. Thoſe few pieces which he ſeems to have attempted in that miſerable ſtrain, called *the Della Cruſca ſtyle*, appear to me to be the leaſt commendable of all his writings. He uſually employs thoſe forms of *verſification*, which have been uſed chiefly by the former writers of poetry in the Scottiſh dialect, and by ſome of the elder Engliſh poets. His *phraſeology* is evidently drawn from thoſe books of Engliſh poetry which were in his hands, from the writings of former Scottiſh

Scottiſh poets, and from thoſe unwritten ſtores of the Scottiſh dialect, which became known to him, in the converſation of his fellow-peaſants. Some other late writers in the Scottiſh dialect ſeem to think, that not to write Engliſh; is certainly, to write Scottiſh. Burns, avoiding this error, hardly ever tranſgreſſed the propriety of Engliſh grammar, except in compliance with the long-accuſtomed variations of the genuine Scottiſh dialect.

From the preceding detail of the particulars of this poet's life, the reader will naturally and juſtly infer him to have been an honeſt, proud, warm-hearted man; of high paſſions, a ſound underſtanding, a vigorous and excurſive imagination. He was never known to deſcend to any act of deliberate meanneſs. In Dumfries, he retained many reſpectable friends, even to the laſt. It may be doubted whether he have not, by his writings, exerciſed a greater power over the minds of men, and by conſequence, on their conduct, upon their happineſs and miſery, upon the general ſyſtem of life, than has been exerciſed by any half dozen of the moſt eminent ſtateſmen of the preſent age. The power of the

ſtateſman

ſtateſman, is but ſhadowy, ſo far as it acts upon externals alone. The power of the writer of genius, ſubdues the heart and the underſtanding, and having thus made the very ſprings of action its own, through them moulds almoſt all life and nature at its pleaſure. BURNS has not failed to command one remarkable ſort of homage, ſuch as is never paid but to great original genius. A crowd of poetaſters ſtarted up to imitate him, by writing verſes as he had done, in the Scottiſh dialect. But, *O imitatores! ſervum pecus!* To perſons to whom the Scottiſh dialect, and the cuſtoms and manners of rural life in Scotland, have no charm; I ſhall poſſibly appear to have ſaid too much about BURNS. By thoſe who paſſionately admire him, I ſhall, perhaps, be blamed, as having ſaid too little.

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